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USSR-NORTH YEMEN: TREATY OF FRIENDSHIP AND COOPERATION

Summary

The "Friendship and Cooperation" treaty signed by the Soviet Union and North Yemen in early October formalizes their longstanding relationship but is more symbolic than substantive. The treaty confirms that maintaining good relations with Moscow is a major goal of North Yemen's foreign policy. We believe, however, that it does not represent a shift on Sanaa's part away from the US. For the Soviets, the treaty represents another success in their current campaign to improve ties with moderate Arab states and promotes the image of the USSR as an important actor in the region. [redacted]

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North Yemen and the Soviet Union have long maintained economic, military and political ties:

-- Diplomatic relations were established in 1928, and Moscow provided crucial aid to the fledgling republic in the 1960s. Indeed, many Yemenis believe that without Soviet help their revolution would have failed.

This paper was prepared by [redacted] Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis, and [redacted] Office of Soviet Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Persian Gulf Division, NESA, [redacted]

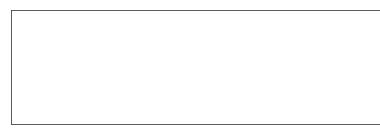
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- The USSR has provided economic aid--about \$55 million in 1982--to Sanaa, mostly in the form of showy development projects.
- Since the 1960s, the Soviet Union has become North Yemen's primary arms supplier, providing about three quarters of Sanaa's military inventory, the bulk stemming from an arms deal in 1979 worth over \$700 million.
- The vast majority of North Yemen's senior military officers have been trained in the USSR. We estimate that some 1,000 North Yemeni military personnel are now receiving instruction in the USSR. Moscow also currently offers about 450 academic scholarships a year to Yemeni civilians, more than twice the number provided by the US.

The new treaty, signed on 9 October, formalizes the USSR-North Yemeni relationship and is basically a modest expansion of their 1964 accord. The 1964 treaty would have been automatically renewed for five years in October, which explains the timing of the new agreement. The new treaty differs from the earlier document in four ways. It has:

- A pledge to consult on international problems that affect both countries' interests.
- A pledge not to take part in actions directed against each other.
- Some anti-colonialist rhetoric.
- A duration of twenty, rather than five, years.

These points are common to all Soviet friendship and cooperation treaties with Third World countries.*

Unlike most other such Soviet treaties, the agreement does not have a clause calling for military cooperation. In addition, the treaty's call for consultations on international problems does not stipulate that the two sides should attempt to coordinate their policies during crises, as does every other Soviet treaty but one. In our view, the North Yemeni accord is the most vague and least binding Soviet friendship and cooperation treaty to date.

We believe the North Yemenis were responsible for the vague nature of the treaty. As early as last year the Soviets were lobbying for an upgrading of the 1964 treaty when it came up for renewal this month.

* North Yemen's is the thirteenth such treaty: two (Egypt and Somalia) were later abrogated. (See attached list.)

[redacted]

In view of the Soviet Union's close relationship with South Yemen and the past tension between the two Yemens, Moscow probably sought to avoid language that could commit it to support North Yemen in a crisis. [redacted]

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Benefits for North Yemen

In return for the agreement, we speculate North Yemen may have obtained a more favorable payment schedule for Sanaa's roughly \$1 billion arms debt to the USSR, and may have received pledges of additional arms deliveries. We believe that repayment for the 1979 arms deal was scheduled to begin in 1984 or 1985. Reporting from the US Embassy in Sanaa [redacted] indicates that during President Salih's visit to Moscow in October he intended to attempt to reschedule the arms debt and to request Soviet air defense equipment. Salih may have asked for tanks and aircraft as well. [redacted]

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President Salih probably will derive several political benefits from the new treaty. His meetings with Chernenko and the high-level reception he got from the Soviet leadership, in contrast to South Yemeni President Hasani's lower-key reception in Moscow a few days before, will boost Salih's political stature in North Yemen. In addition, North Yemenis may perceive Salih's red-carpet treatment in Moscow and the new treaty as a counter to Soviet ties to South Yemen, a recurring concern of the North Yemeni government, according to US Embassy officials in Sanaa. [redacted]

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The treaty also serves as a political counterweight to Saudi influence. Riyadh had been pressing Sanaa to demarcate the border between the two countries. The agreement may stiffen Sanaa's resistance to settling the matter on Saudi terms. The Saudis will almost certainly signal their displeasure with the new accord, but in time Sanaa could exploit Saudi fears of an expanded Soviet presence in North Yemen to extract additional economic or military assistance. [redacted]

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Implications for the USSR

For the Soviets, the treaty--like their other friendship and cooperation accords--has more symbolic than substantive value, in our judgment. They can point to it as evidence that their influence in the Arab world extends beyond the radical states. The signing comes at a time when Moscow is seeking, with some success, to improve ties with most moderate Arab governments, and the Kremlin probably hopes the treaty will assist this campaign by improving the Soviet image with other moderates. Still, the new accord probably will complicate Soviet efforts to court the Saudis. In fact, Moscow's decision to sign the treaty may reflect a judgment that there is little prospect for improved relations with Riyadh any time soon. [redacted]

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The treaty brings the Soviets' relationship with Sanaa in line with the new style of friendship and cooperation treaties they began signing with Third World states in the early 1970s. The 1964 accord did not fit this pattern, and the new agreement in a sense ties up a loose end. [redacted]

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Substantively, the treaty adds a bit more formality to the Soviet-North Yemeni relationship and, Moscow hopes, greater stability. The aim of such treaties is to base the relationship on legal institutions rather than on personalities, so that Soviet-North Yemeni ties will survive Salih's departure. There is nothing in the treaty, however, that guarantees this will be the case or ensures, as Egypt's and Somalia's abrogation of similar treaties showed, that the current North Yemeni leadership will not have a change of heart. [redacted]

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The treaty, because it is so general, is unlikely to have a negative effect on the USSR's relationship with South Yemen. The Soviets presumably briefed Hasani on the agreement during his early October stay in Moscow. Their treaty with Aden, signed in 1979, is somewhat more binding, and in any case, their relations with the Marxist regime there are closer than those with North Yemen. The existence of friendship and cooperation treaties with both sides could be embarrassing for the Soviets should hostilities again break out between the two Yemens. Moscow probably judges, however, that such a situation would be complicated with or without extant treaties with both Sanaa and Aden. [redacted]

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Implications for the United States

Although the treaty does not substantially alter North Yemeni-Soviet relations, it confirms that maintaining good relations with Moscow is a major goal of Sanaa's foreign policy. Moreover, if the Soviets did promise economic and technical help, this in time could lead to an increase in the Soviet presence in North Yemen. Currently there are some 500 to 750 Soviet military advisers, and 100 to 200 economists and other specialists in the country. [redacted]

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Still, the North Yemenis probably did not intend the treaty as a slap at relations with the United States. Despite several opportunities, Salih did not join Chernenko during the visit in blaming the US for problems in the Middle East. North Yemeni government officials have gone to some lengths to point out to US Embassy officers in Sanaa the unremarkable nature of the new treaty. [redacted]

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In addition, other reports indicate that the recent oil discovery by a US firm strengthened President Salih's desires for better relations with Washington. The new North Yemeni ambassador to the United States--who was instrumental in restoring relations with Washington in 1972 when he was Prime Minister--told a US diplomat in Sanaa that he had been ordered by the President to improve relations with the United States. In discussions with diplomats in Sanaa, the North Yemeni deputy foreign minister said that following the oil find Salih had given specific instructions to seek better bilateral relations with Washington. The Yemeni official noted that Salih also sought to meet with the President of the United States. [redacted]

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Soviet Friendship and Cooperation Treaties with Third World Countries

Egypt*	27 May 1971
India	9 Aug 1972
Iraq	9 Apr 1972
Somalia#	11 Jul 1974
Angola	8 Oct 1976
Mozambique	31 Mar 1977
Vietnam	3 Nov 1978
Ethiopia	20 Nov 1978
Afghanistan	5 Dec 1978
South Yemen	25 Oct 1979
Syria	8 Oct 1980
Congo	13 May 1981
North Yemen	9 Oct 1984

* Egypt abrogated the treaty on 15 March 1976.

Somalia abrogated the treaty on 13 November 1977.

SUBJECT: USSR-North Yemen: Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation

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27-30 - CPAS/IMD/CB
31 - C/DDO/NE
32 - DDO/NE/[REDACTED]
33 - D/SOVA
34 - C/SOVA/PA
35 - C/SOVA/TF
36 - C/SOVA/SF
37 - C/SOVA/EA
38 - C/SOVA/DI
39 - C/SOVA/SE
40 - C/SOVA/TW
41 - C/SOVA/TW/A
42 - C/SOVA/TW/T
43 - C/SOVA/TW/M
44 - SOVA/TW/M/[REDACTED]
45 - SOVA/TW/M/Chrono
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47 - D/NESA
48-50 - NESA/PS
51 - C/NESA/AI
52 - C/NESA/PG
53 - NESA/PG/R
54-57 - NESA/PG/P

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